

# NASA Facts

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Remarks by the Honorable Sean O’Keefe  
NASA Administrator  
Team America Rocketry Challenge  
Great Meadow  
The Plains, Virginia

Thank you John (John Douglass, President and CEO Aerospace Industries Association) and welcome everyone.

I’m delighted to help congratulate all the participants in this, the largest rocket contest ever held in the world.

Let me recognize at the outset Mark Bundick and the National Association of Rocketry for conducting such an impressive event; my good friends General Jack Daily from the National Air and Space Museum and Dr. Vance Coffman of Lockheed-Martin; Homer Hickam, one of the original “rocket boys” and one of NASA’s all-time heroes; astronaut Jay Apt a veteran of four Space Shuttle missions and an accomplished space walker; Art Stephenson, the Director of NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center and key leader of NASA’s Student Launch Initiative; and the Senator from a state that knows a great deal about the pioneering spirit, the honorable Mike Enzi. Senator, I’m delighted you could join us today.

Now I’m going to let you in on a little secret. All of us are here today not just because we like to hand out awards. Seeing all of you out there on the firing line, as you intently prepared to punch holes in the sky with your homemade rockets, and in the process conducted the world’s largest parachute egg recovery operation, in no small measure helped fire all of us up.

You see, those of us in positions of responsibility for our nation's air and space programs hear a lot of negative things about young people today. We often hear that young people today don't study hard, don't set goals, aren't interested in space flight, and don't seek out new pathways of exploration and discovery. And to those who would say that, I would offer a simple challenge: Let them come to the Team America Rocketry Challenge!

Indeed, events like this will hopefully give all of you a leg up in helping you prepare for exciting scientific careers. I have no doubt that if you continue to work hard in your studies, stay focused on your goals, and take advantage of opportunities like the Team America Rocketry Challenge, the sky and the heavens beyond will become not your limit, but rather your venue for some fantastic exploration and discovery experiences.

At NASA, we express our ambitions for the future with our mission objectives of understanding and protecting the home planet, exploring the Universe and searching for life, and inspiring the next generation of explorers, the generation to which you belong.

So if you will I'd like to briefly paint you a picture of the kinds of work you might be engaged in as your careers evolve and your horizons enlarge in parallel with our nation's expanding space capabilities.

When the history of your time is written, we can imagine that your generation of explorers will have sought life's abodes in our corner of the universe. As astronomers, planetary biologists and geologists, you will help map continents on dozens of planets circling nearby stars, some of which will show signs of life supporting atmospheres.

You will also help to search for evidence that life exists on planets within our own solar system, as revealed by advanced generations of robotic explorers, such as the twin Mars robot explorers that we will be launching to our neighboring planet next month.

Certainly, you will also help bring about the new commerce that our expanded technological reach into space will enable. The day is drawing near that low-Earth orbit will become a rapid growth economic zone, with commercial industries taking advantage of low gravity, abundant solar energy, and a vista for research that encompasses the entire planet.

And it is entirely conceivable that future space explorers, supported by the teamwork of scientists and engineers the caliber of Homer Hickam and Art Stephenson will establish permanent bases on the moon and Mars.

That is the world that you will grow up in. This is the world that you will help create.

So while there are some great challenges in the world today, we should not lose sight of the fact that you will grow up in a world of great opportunities. It will be your challenge and opportunity to continue helping pioneer the future...to push the envelope...to do what has never been done before. I envy you that future.

Congratulations once again for competing at such a high level here today, and thank you for being such a wonderful audience.